PATTERNS OF POWER · THE SETTLEMENT PROTOCOL

The Slave and the Registrar

The Janissary and the Nomenklatura — One Device for Binding an Elite by Withholding, Built Twice from Opposite Doctrines, and the Two Ways It Ends

HELD AS TESTED, NOT REVEALED

THE SLAVE AND THE REGISTRAR

Preface: the collaboration, and what this study is for

On how the work was made, the claim it makes, and the discipline it is held in.

This study is part of the Patterns of Power series, and it is a collaboration. The research direction and the judgement are the author's; the historical synthesis, the drafting, and much of the scholarly retrieval were done with Claude, Anthropic's model, and the load-bearing facts on both sides of the comparison were checked against the record before they were used. The method is stated openly because it is an emerging form of knowledge production and ought to be visible rather than concealed.

This study is a comparison, and it exists because two orders that could hardly be more different — the Ottoman Empire of the fifteenth century and the Soviet Union of the twentieth — built, at their foundings, what turns out to be the *same device* for holding a ruling elite in line, and then had that device fail on them in the *same way*, and end in two *different* ways that the framework can explain. The Ottoman sultans raised a governing class of slaves, taken as Christian boys, converted, and forbidden to own, to marry, or to pass anything to a son. The Soviet Union raised a governing class of appointees, each holding nothing but a revocable post on a list. The doctrines were opposite; the recruitment was opposite; the centuries were far apart and unconnected. And yet the structural core is nearly identical, and the reason it is identical is that both orders were solving the same problem — how to build a powerful elite that cannot turn its power against the hand that grants it — and both reached, independently, the same unusual answer: bind the elite not by giving it something to lose, but by ensuring it has nothing of its own at all.

That two unconnected civilisations built the same device from opposite doctrines is, for this series, a significant kind of evidence, and the study says why at the outset. When two investigations of unrelated material keep turning up the same structure, the structure is more likely to be a real feature of the problem than an artefact of either case. The framework is stated as needed below; no prior reading of any other paper in the series is required, and where this study draws on a companion paper it pauses and explains the idea in plain words before using it. The framework is held as tested, not revealed. And the study carries one discipline above all, stated here and enforced throughout: the admiration this analysis shows for the *cleverness* of the device must never soften what the device was made of. On the Ottoman side it was the enslavement of children taken from their families; on the Soviet side it was a caste of privilege in a society told it was equal, resting on deportation and domination at its edges. To explain how ingeniously a thing bound its elite is to describe a machine, not to bless it.

THE SLAVE AND THE REGISTRAR
SECTION ONE

The puzzle

Two ruling classes, five centuries and a civilisation apart, built on opposite beliefs — one of slaves, one of appointees — turn out to have been bound to their masters by the very same trick, and to have broken free from it by the very same slow corruption. How did the same structure appear twice, and why did it fail the same way?

Put two elites side by side that no historian would naturally compare. The first is the Ottoman *kul* — the slave-soldiers and slave-administrators, most famously the **janissaries**, who ran the armies and much of the government of the Ottoman Empire at its height. They were, in law, the personal slaves of the sultan: taken as boys from Christian villages in the Balkans, converted to Islam, cut from their families, trained, and set to rule an empire, forbidden to marry, forbidden to own heritable property, forbidden to have any loyalty but to the sultan who owned them. The second is the Soviet **nomenklatura** — the class of perhaps one and a half per cent of the population who held every position of importance in the twentieth-century Soviet state, each of them appointed to a post on a list maintained by the party committee one level above, owning no land, no capital, nothing heritable, holding everything through the appointment and nothing on his own account.

Everything on the surface says these are utterly different things. One is a slave army of a Muslim empire built on conquest and a sacred monarchy; the other is a bureaucratic caste of an atheist superpower built on a doctrine of equality and the abolition of private property. One recruited by seizing children; the other by promoting adults. One professed devotion to a god-favoured sultan; the other professed Marxism-Leninism. Five centuries separate them and no thread connects them. And yet, if you look past the doctrines to the *structure* — to the actual arrangement by which each elite was held to its master — they are almost the same thing. In both, the member's entire endowment was a position granted from above

and revocable from above. In both, the member was forbidden the one thing that would have given him independence: a base of his own that could outlast the grantor's favour — a heritable estate, a private fortune, a lineage, a following. In both, the elite was deliberately made *rootless*, so that it had nothing to fall back on except the position, and therefore nothing to fight the master with.

And here is the sharper half of the puzzle. Not only were the two built the same way; they *broke* the same way. Both systems, over time, saw their members acquire the very thing the founding design had forbidden — the right to marry and pass the position to a son, a private economic stake on the side — and in both, the moment the members acquired that independent base, the elite turned from the master's most reliable instrument into something that served itself. The janissaries became a hereditary, propertied guild that made and unmade sultans; the nomenklatura, at the end, converted its positions into private property. Same device at the founding, same corruption at the end. How does one structure appear twice from opposite doctrines, why does it bind so tightly, and why does it always rot in the same direction? That is the puzzle, and its answer reveals something the framework had seen only one case of at a time.

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SECTION TWO

The framework, for a reader who has not met it

Binding an elite, conferral versus withholding, and the two things a member can hold.

This rests on a few ideas, built here from nothing.

Every ruling order faces a problem this series calls *elite coordination*. An order is not one ruler; it is many powerful people — commanders, administrators, officials — any of whom might defect, combine against the top, or simply refuse to serve. No ruler can force all his own powerful subordinates all of the time, so the order needs each of them to have a private reason to keep serving rather than to break away. When an order manages this, it holds together almost by itself, because each powerful member, pursuing his own advantage, finds that his advantage lies in supporting the arrangement that gives him his place. This series calls that self-holding alignment **the default**: the order reproduces itself without anyone consciously conspiring to hold it up, because each beneficiary, in defending his own position, thereby defends the whole. It works among people who need not like or trust one another; it needs only that each is better off inside than outside.

There are two ways to produce this alignment, and the whole of the present comparison lives in the difference between them. The ordinary way is **conferral**: give each powerful member something valuable that he holds *through* the arrangement and would lose if the arrangement fell — an estate, an office with revenues, a title, a hereditary stake. Now he defends the order because the order is what makes his valuable thing his. Most ruling settlements in history work this way. But there is a second, rarer way, which this series has named **binding by withholding**: instead of giving the member something he would lose by defecting, ensure that he has *nothing else at all* — no independent base of any kind — so that his sole possession is the revocable position, and defection is not so much punished as made impossible,

because he has no platform to defect from and nothing to fund a defection with. Conferral binds by making the member rich enough to have something to protect; withholding binds by keeping him poor enough to have nothing to fight with. The two produce loyalty by opposite means.

The key to understanding why a withholding-bound elite is at first so stable and later so treacherous is a distinction between *two things a member can hold*. He can hold a **title** — an ownable, defensible, ideally heritable thing (land, a fortune, a hereditary office) that is *his*, that the order merely recognises, and that he could in principle use *against* the order or carry *out* of it. Or he can hold a mere **registration** — a position on a list, entirely a creature of the granting authority, which is nothing without that authority's continued backing and cannot be carried anywhere or used against anyone. A title must be *defended*, and so its holder is tied to whatever order defends it, stubbornly, even resentfully. A registration merely *transfers*: its holder has nothing to defend, and so can re-register under any new authority that appears, at no cost. This distinction, as we will see, is the hinge of the whole comparison: a withholding-bound elite holds only registrations at first, which makes it supremely loyal and instantly disposable both — and it decays precisely by slowly converting its registrations into titles, at which point everything changes.

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SECTION THREE

The two histories, told plainly

Who the janissaries and the nomenklatura were, for a reader who knows neither.

The janissaries and the kul. The Ottoman Empire arose around 1300 as one of several small warrior-states on the frontier between the Islamic and Byzantine worlds, and grew over the next two centuries into an empire straddling the Balkans, Anatolia, and eventually the Arab lands. Its early sultans faced a problem common to conquering dynasties: the great Turkish noble families and frontier warlords who had helped them conquer were also their most dangerous rivals, with their own lands, their own followers, and their own claims, quite capable of pulling the young state apart or reducing the sultan to a figurehead among near-equals. The Ottoman answer, developed from the late fourteenth century under Sultan Murad I and his successors, was one of the most remarkable institutions in the history of government: the **kul** system, from the Turkish word for "slave." The sultans built a governing class of their own personal slaves — and, crucially, they recruited it through the **devshirme**, the "child levy," periodically taking young Christian boys from the Balkan provinces, converting them to Islam, separating them permanently from their families, and training them in palace schools for war and administration. The military branch of this slave class was the **janissary** corps (from *yeni çeri*, "new soldiers"), one of the first standing professional infantry armies in the world; the ablest devshirme recruits rose instead into the palace administration, and some to the very highest offices of the empire, including grand vizier.

What made the kul so useful was exactly what it lacked. Because a kul was taken as a child from a foreign village, converted, and cut from his family, he had no clan, no region, no noble lineage, no faction of his own — no loyalty and no base except the sultan who owned him. And the founding rules kept it that way. A kul was forbidden to marry or to have children without the sultan's express consent; he was

forbidden to own heritable property; he was, in law and in life, supposed to have no allegiance but to the sultan. He held a position and its salary and its honours, all from the sultan, all revocable by the sultan, and he could pass none of it to a son because he was to have no son. This slave elite ran the empire's armies and much of its government from roughly the mid-fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, and at its height it was the most formidable and disciplined instrument of state in the world — a governing class engineered to have nothing of its own.

The nomenklatura. Five centuries later and with an opposite creed, the Soviet Union built a governing class on the same structural principle. The Soviet state, after 1917, abolished private ownership of land and capital, and it staffed every position of importance — in the state, the economy, the army, the security organs, the universities, the press, the arts, the farms — through a system of appointment lists called the **nomenklatura**, a word meaning roughly "a schedule of names." For each important post there was a list, held by a party committee one level up, of the positions that committee filled and the vetted people eligible. To be somebody was to be *on a list*. The people who held the listed positions — perhaps one and a half per cent of the population — were a real ruling and administrative class, with genuine privileges: a better apartment than the years-long queue would yield, in the higher ranks a car and driver, access to closed shops stocked with goods ordinary citizens could not buy, a place at a good sanatorium, superior medicine, and the standing of the post. But — and this is the whole point — the member owned none of it. He held no land, no capital, no share of any enterprise, nothing heritable; every privilege arrived with the appointment and vanished with it; the position belonged, in the end, to the committee that had listed him and could de-list him. Like the kul, the nomenklatura member's entire endowment was a revocable position, and he was forbidden — here by the abolition of private property itself — the independent base that would have let him stand on his own. This study draws its Soviet evidence especially from the Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), annexed in 1940 and held until 1991, where the mechanism operated under the extra strain of national difference between rulers and ruled and where its ending can be measured cleanly.

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SECTION FOUR

The same device: binding an elite by ensuring it owns nothing

Where the two are structurally identical, laid out point by point.

Set the two side by side at their foundings and the identity is close enough to be startling. Four features define the device, and both cases have all four.

First, the whole endowment is a revocable position and nothing else. The kul held his rank, his pay, and his standing from the sultan, and all of it reverted to the sultan; he owned nothing that did not flow from the master. The nomenklatura member held his post and its perquisites from the committee above him, and all of it left with the appointment. In neither case did the member own the thing that made him someone. Strip the position and you strip everything, in a single act — a word from the sultan, a telephone call from the committee.

Second, the member is forbidden the heritable base. The kul was forbidden to marry, to father heirs, to own heritable property — the founding prohibitions targeting precisely the danger of a self-perpetuating lineage with a stake of its own. The nomenklatura member owned no land or capital and could pass nothing to a son; a father's disgrace was, if anything, a harm to his children rather than an inheritance. Both designs cut off, at the root, the one thing that turns an elite into a hereditary interest independent of the grantor.

Third, the member has no prior loyalty and no independent constituency. The devshirme deliberately took the kul as a foreign child and severed his family, clan, and region, so that he was loyal to the sultan because he had no one and nothing else to be loyal to. The nomenklatura was arranged, especially in the national republics, through crossed chains of command — the party pyramid, the Moscow-appointed supervisor, the all-union economic ministries, the security organs — so that no member inside a republic ever held force, wealth, and information together, and each

was dependent on the centre for the parts he lacked. Both engineered *rootlessness*: an elite with no base of its own to fall back on.

Fourth, there is a single author of the member's standing. Every kul's rank flowed from the one sultan; every nomenklatura position from the one centre. There was no second source — no intermediate lord, no rival institution — that could grant a member his standing independently, and therefore no seam along which the elite could split its loyalty. This series calls a system with exactly one source of legitimate standing a case of *sole authorship*, and holds that it is one of the strongest foundations a ruling order can have, because an elite that draws its entire standing from one source has no one else to turn to. Both the kul and the nomenklatura were engineered sole-authorship: the elite held everything from one hand and nothing on its own.

Put the four together and the device is one device: *bind the elite by ensuring it owns nothing of its own, so that its only possession is a position held from a single source that can revoke it at will.* The Ottomans built it out of slavery and a child levy; the Soviets built it out of appointment lists and the abolition of private property. The materials could not be more different and the structure is the same, because the structure is the solution to a problem both faced — how to raise a powerful elite that cannot turn its power against you — and the solution, reached twice independently, was to give the elite power but no property, standing but no base, everything to use and nothing to keep.

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SECTION FIVE

Why the device binds so tightly

The same reason in both cases: an elite with nothing cannot fund its own defection.

The device binds more tightly than the ordinary method of conferral, and it binds tightly for the same reason in both empires. Run the framework's test — ask whether each member, in defending his position, defends the whole — and the answer is yes at every level, because the member has nothing but the position, so defending the position and defending the order are the same act.

The logic is starkest when you ask what a discontented member could actually *do*. A landed nobleman who resents his king can retire to his estates, live on his own rents, maintain his own armed followers, marry his children into other discontented houses, and, if it comes to it, finance a rebellion from his own resources — because he has a base independent of the king. A kul could do none of this. He had no estate to retire to, no private income to live on, no lineage to ally, no followers who were his rather than the sultan's; the moment he was stripped of his position he had nothing at all. A nomenklatura member was in the identical position: no private wealth, no independent income, no base, nothing convertible into a war chest, and a family that shared his fall rather than carrying on his line. In both cases the member's loyalty was not really a matter of calculation — of weighing the gains of defection against the losses — because there was no base from which a defection could even be launched. The device does not make defection *unattractive*; it makes defection *impossible*, or nearly so, by ensuring the would-be defector has nothing to defect with. As the Soviet study in this series puts it, an elite with no independent base is more reliable than a landed one, *not less*, because there is no base from which a dissent could be funded, and therefore no dissent is funded. (I quote that paper because it states the mechanism in its sharpest form; the point is simply that having nothing to fight with is a tighter leash than having something to lose.)

Both empires, moreover, proved the mechanism the same way — by what they did to members who began to acquire an independent base. In the Soviet case, the party members who built a local following and a policy of their own — the "national communists" of the Baltic republics in the 1950s — were purged the moment they did so, under a charge kept ready for exactly that offence, because an independent base was the one thing the withholding could not permit. The Ottoman sultans, at the height of the system, likewise moved against kul who grew too independent, and the whole architecture of the palace school and the frequent rotation of officials was designed to prevent any slave-administrator from building a regional power base of his own. In both, the order tolerated and even rewarded great ability — it needed able men and produced them in quantity — and struck only at the one thing it could not allow, which was a member acquiring a second source of standing. That the same offence was punished in both is the clearest sign that the same mechanism was at work.

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SECTION SIX

Why the device rots the same way

In both cases the members slowly acquire the forbidden base — heredity and a private stake — and the leash inverts.

Here is the finding the comparison exists to deliver: both devices decayed by the *same route*, and it is the route the design was built to prevent. A withholding-bound elite is stable only for as long as the withholding holds. The instant its members begin to acquire the forbidden independent base — a heritable position, a private economic stake — the leash inverts: the elite stops drawing its whole standing from the grantor and begins to draw part of it from itself, and an elite that stands partly on its own is no longer bound by having nothing, because it no longer has nothing.

The Ottoman case runs this corruption in slow motion across two centuries and it is documented in detail. The founding prohibitions eroded one by one. The ban on marriage began to give way in the early sixteenth century — the sultan Selim I is generally credited with lifting it — and once janissaries could marry and have families, the pressure to let their sons into the corps became irresistible, so that positions increasingly passed from father to son and the corps turned, over the seventeenth century, from a body of converted foreign slaves into a substantially *hereditary* Muslim guild. At the same time the ban on trade collapsed: janissaries in the great cities went into commerce, opened shops, took over the leadership of craft guilds, collected market dues, and acquired tax farms, building exactly the independent economic base the founding design had denied them. The devshirme itself withered and was effectively abandoned by the later seventeenth century, so that the corps no longer even recruited in the way that had made it rootless. And as the janissaries acquired heredity and a private economic stake, they ceased to be the sultan's instrument and became an interest that served itself: a corps that drew its standing from its own hereditary membership and its own wealth could defy the

sultan, and did, becoming over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a praetorian power that made and unmade rulers, vetoed reforms that threatened its privileges, and mounted revolt after revolt. The slave-guard engineered to have nothing had acquired something, and having acquired something, it turned.

The Soviet case runs the same corruption but compressed, and at the very end. For most of its history the nomenklatura held to the pure form — registrations only, no heritable base — which is why it stayed reliable for decades. But when the order collapsed around 1991, the transition brought *privatisation*: the conversion of state enterprises into private property. And privatisation is precisely the moment a position can be turned into a possession — the moment a registration can be converted into a title. Where the old appointed elite controlled how privatisation was done, its members converted the positions they held into ownership of the assets they had administered, becoming a propertied elite where before they had held only revocable posts. The Soviet study in this series states the mechanism exactly: the appointed elite became an owning elite to the extent that the privatisation instrument was drafted by insiders — the order had converted things into relations so that nothing could be independently owned, and the transition converted relations back into things, and whoever held the relevant relation at the moment of conversion had a claim to the thing. (I quote that finding because it names the hinge precisely: the rot, in both empires, is the conversion of a revocable *relation* into an ownable *thing*.)

So both devices decayed by the identical vector, differing only in speed: the members acquired a *heritable* position and a *private economic stake*, converting their registrations into titles, and the leash that had bound them by their having nothing inverted the moment they had something. The janissaries took two centuries to make the conversion, through creeping heredity and commerce; the nomenklatura made it in a decade, through privatisation. But it is the same conversion, and it is the specific death the withholding design is always vulnerable to, because the one thing such a design must forbid forever — an independent, heritable base — is the one thing its powerful members will always, given the chance, try to acquire.

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SECTION SEVEN

Why the device ends two different ways

The title/registration distinction explains why one elite had to be massacred and the other merely changed its letterhead.

The two cases decayed the same way but *ended* differently, and the difference is the sharpest thing the comparison has to teach, because it is explained precisely by how far each elite had converted its registrations into titles before the end came.

The janissaries ended in slaughter. By the early nineteenth century the corps had long since become a hereditary, propertied, entrenched interest — it held *titles*: heritable positions, real wealth, shops and guild offices and tax farms, a corporate identity worth defending. And an elite that holds titles *defends* them, because titles are ownable things that a new order might strip away. So when the sultan Mahmud II finally moved to abolish the corps in 1826 — in the event Ottoman history calls the "Auspicious Incident" — the janissaries could not simply be dismissed or re-registered; they had a base of their own to fight from, and they fought, and the sultan destroyed them by force, killing or scattering thousands. The corps had crossed so far from registration to title that it had become, in effect, a landed interest, and a landed interest that will not go quietly has to be broken.

The nomenklatura ended almost bloodlessly. When the Soviet centre failed around 1991, most of the elite still held *registrations* — revocable positions, not yet converted into defensible property — and an elite that holds registrations has nothing to defend, because a position re-registers under any new authority at no cost. So the nomenklatura did not have to be destroyed; it *transferred*. When new sources of appointment appeared — sovereign parliaments, restored republics — the same men simply occupied equivalent positions in the new structures, because there was nothing that had to be transferred, revalidated, or defended in a court. The

Soviet periphery changed flags in a matter of months with remarkably little fighting, and the men who had run the republics for the Soviet Union largely went on to run them for their new nations. The one exception proves the rule exactly: where fighting did occur, it was where the security organs — the men who *were* the instruments of force and who did have an entrenched institutional stake — were the incumbents. Elsewhere, an elite that held only registrations had nothing to fight for and everything to gain by re-registering, and so it re-registered.

This is the framework's title/registration distinction doing its work, and the comparison is what makes it visible, because the *same* device ended two *different* ways for one reason: how far each elite had converted its holdings from registrations into titles before the end. The janissaries had, over two centuries, converted so far toward heritable title that they fought like a landed aristocracy and had to be massacred like one. The nomenklatura collapsed *before* it had substantially made that conversion — the privatisation that would have turned its positions into property was, in 1991, still ahead of it or just beginning — so it still held registrations and transferred like the pure appointed elite it still mostly was. The general law stands behind both: an elite bound by withholding is tight and brittle while it holds only registrations, and becomes sticky and defended precisely to the degree that it converts those registrations into titles. Where an elite sits on that spectrum at the moment of crisis determines whether it changes its letterhead or has to be destroyed.

THE SLAVE AND THE REGISTRAR
SECTION EIGHT

What the comparison shows, and where it strains

The finding, the convergence, and the honest limits.

What it shows. The comparison delivers three things. First, that binding-an-elite-by-withholding is a real and distinct device, not a peculiarity of one case, because two utterly unconnected orders — a fifteenth-century Islamic slave-empire and a twentieth-century atheist superpower — built it independently, from opposite doctrines, and built it with the same four features: a revocable position as the whole endowment, a forbidden heritable base, engineered rootlessness, and a single author of standing. Two independent arrivals at one structure are strong evidence that the structure is a real solution to a real problem rather than an artefact of either case. Second, that the device fails by a characteristic route: its members slowly acquire the forbidden base — heredity and a private economic stake — converting their revocable registrations into ownable titles, and the leash that bound them by their having nothing inverts the moment they have something. Both the janissaries and the nomenklatura died by this exact conversion, differing only in speed. And third, that the device ends in one of two ways determined by how far that conversion has gone: an elite still holding registrations transfers almost bloodlessly (the nomenklatura in 1991); an elite that has converted far toward heritable title has to be broken by force (the janissaries in 1826). The title/registration distinction, which the framework had, is here shown doing real explanatory work across two cases and two very different endings.

Above all the comparison confirms, from a fresh direction, the series' claim that the elite is bound by *positions* and not by *beliefs*. The two elites professed opposite doctrines — devotion to a sacred sultan, and Marxist-Leninist equality — and in neither case did the doctrine bind them; the *structure* did. The clearest proof is the

Soviet ending, where the entire doctrine evaporated in 1991 without a single position being disturbed, because the doctrine was the costume and the position was the reality. That the same structural device worked under two opposite doctrines is the point: the device is doctrine-independent, which is why it could be built twice from creeds that shared nothing.

Where it strains. Three honest strains. First, the identity of the two devices is close but not perfect, and the differences should not be flattened. The kul was literally chattel — a slave in law, taken as a child by force — while the nomenklatura member was a free adult who joined a career; the kul's bond was legal ownership, the nomenklatura member's was economic and administrative dependence. The structural *effect* was similar (an elite with no independent base), but the human reality was very different, and the comparison is one of structure, not of condition. Second, the "same rot, different speed" claim compresses two very different processes. The janissary degradation was a slow, organic erosion of prohibitions across two centuries, driven from within the corps; the nomenklatura's conversion was a sudden, externally-triggered event (the collapse of the whole state and a deliberate privatisation programme) compressed into a few years. Calling both "the conversion of registration into title" is analytically true but should not obscure that one was a gradual institutional decay and the other a catastrophic systemic collapse. Third — and this is a matter the framework insists on — neither ending was, at the political level, a pure test of the device's internal logic uncontaminated by outside forces. The janissary abolition was a deliberate act of state by a reforming sultan responding to military humiliation by foreign powers; the Soviet collapse was driven by economic failure, external pressure, and a reform process that escaped its authors, none of which the device itself explains. The comparison illuminates the *behaviour of the elite* within these endings — why one fought and one transferred — but it does not claim to explain *why* either empire reached its crisis, which is a far larger question the framework does not address.

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SECTION NINE

The disciplines: what this analysis must not flatten

Four cautions.

The cleverness of the device is not a virtue of what it was made of. This study has analysed, with evident analytical pleasure, the elegance of binding an elite by ensuring it owns nothing. That pleasure must not be allowed to launder the materials. On the Ottoman side, the device was built out of the enslavement of children — the *devshirme* was the forcible seizure of boys from their families, their conversion under compulsion, and their permanent separation from everyone they had known, and however "meritocratic" the career that followed, its foundation was the theft and enslavement of the young. On the Soviet side, the device was a caste of material privilege in a society officially devoted to equality, resting at its edges on deportation, national subjugation, and the pricing-out of an entire population from the goods its rulers enjoyed. To describe how ingeniously either device bound its elite is to describe a machine of domination, and the ingenuity is the ingenuity of a cage.

Rootlessness engineered is a violence, not merely a design choice. The comparison treats the "engineered rootlessness" of both elites coolly, as the mechanism that produced loyalty. But rootlessness, engineered, is something done *to* people. The kul was made rootless by having his childhood, his family, his faith, and his name taken from him. The nomenklatura's crossed chains and the wider Soviet system were laid over nations made rootless by mass deportation and demographic engineering. The analytical term "rootlessness" names, in the human register, a set of deep deprivations inflicted on real people, and the coolness of the analysis must not be mistaken for coolness about the thing analysed.

The elite's reliability was purchased with someone else's subordination. Both devices produced a supremely reliable ruling class, and this study has explained how. But the reliability of a ruling class is not a good in itself; it is the efficiency of a structure of domination, and a more reliable elite often means a more thoroughly dominated population, because the elite's inability to defect also meant the population's inability to find, within the elite, any fracture to exploit. To admire the tightness of the bind is, if one is not careful, to admire the smoothness with which a people was held down. The framework describes the bind; it does not endorse the domination the bind made efficient.

And the comparison is of structures, not a claim that the two orders were morally alike. To say the janissary and the nomenklatura were the same *device* is a structural claim, and it must not slide into a claim that the Ottoman Empire and the Soviet Union were the same kind of thing, or equally good or bad, or comparable in any register but the narrow one of how they bound their elites. They were vastly different orders with vastly different histories, and this study compares one mechanism they happened to share. A reader who takes the structural comparison as a general equation of the two orders has extended it far past what it can bear.

Conclusion: the leash of having nothing

Returning to the puzzle.

The puzzle was that two ruling classes, five centuries and a civilisation apart, built on opposite beliefs — one of slaves taken as children, one of appointees holding posts on a list — turn out to have been bound to their masters by the very same trick, and to have broken free of it by the very same slow corruption. How did the same structure appear twice, and why did it fail the same way?

The answer is that both were solving the same problem — how to raise an elite powerful enough to run an empire but unable to turn its power against the hand that raised it — and both reached, independently, the same unusual solution: bind the elite not by giving it something to lose but by ensuring it has nothing of its own at all. The Ottomans built this out of slavery and a child levy; the Soviets built it out of appointment lists and the abolition of private property; but the structure was one structure, with the same four features — a revocable position as the entire endowment, a forbidden heritable base, an engineered rootlessness, and a single source of all standing. And it bound both elites more tightly than any grant of land or title could have, for the same reason in both: an elite that owns nothing cannot fund its own defection, so a leash of having nothing is tighter than a leash of having something to lose.

But a device that binds by withholding is only as durable as the withholding, and both devices rotted by the identical route — the members slowly acquired the one thing the design had forbidden, a heritable base and a private stake, converting their revocable registrations into ownable titles, and the leash inverted the moment they had something of their own. The janissaries made the conversion over two centuries, through creeping heredity and commerce, until they were a propertied hereditary

guild that made and unmade sultans. The nomenklatura made it in a decade, through a privatisation that turned positions into property. And the two ended differently for one reason, which is the deepest thing the comparison shows: how far each had converted registration into title before the end. The janissaries had converted so far toward heritable, defended property that they fought like a landed aristocracy and had to be destroyed by force in 1826. The nomenklatura collapsed while it still held mostly registrations, with nothing to defend, and so it transferred — the same men re-registering under new flags in 1991, almost without a fight.

The leash of having nothing, then, is the tightest leash a ruler can put on an elite and the most treacherous, and it is treacherous in a precise and predictable way. It holds perfectly while the elite has nothing but the position; it inverts the instant the elite acquires a base of its own; and whether the order can then dismiss the elite with a word or must destroy it with an army depends entirely on how far, by the time the crisis comes, the elite has turned the position it was lent into a possession it can call its own. The Ottomans lent their slaves an empire and forbade them everything else, and watched the slaves slowly take the everything-else and become masters who had to be massacred. The Soviets lent their appointees a state and forbade them property, and watched the appointees, when the state failed, walk their positions across into the new order and, where they could, turn them at last into the property they had never been allowed to hold. Two empires built the same cage from opposite faiths, and both learned the same lesson: an elite bound by having nothing is yours completely, until the day it has something — and then it was never yours at all.

THE SLAVE AND THE REGISTRAR
SOURCES

A note on sources and scholarship

What this rests on, what is standard, and what is contested.

The framework. The theory applied here — elite coordination, the *default* (an order reproducing itself because each beneficiary in defending his position defends the whole), binding by conferral versus binding by withholding, sole authorship (a single source of legitimate standing), and the distinction between a *title* that must be defended and a *registration* that merely transfers — is developed across the companion papers of this series and applied here rather than argued from scratch. Two of those companion findings are quoted directly in the text: that an elite with no independent base is more reliable than a landed one because no dissent can be funded, and that an appointed elite becomes an owning elite to the extent that insiders draft the instrument of privatisation. Both are drawn from this series' study of the Soviet nomenklatura, and are quoted because they state the mechanism in its sharpest form; the surrounding argument does not depend on the quotations beyond the plain points they make. This study's own contribution is the comparison itself: the demonstration that the kul and the nomenklatura are one device built twice, that they decay by the same conversion of registration into title, and that they end in the two different ways the title/registration distinction predicts.

The Ottoman/janissary spine. The origins of the kul and devshirme systems under Murad I and his successors in the late fourteenth century; the devshirme as the periodic levy of Christian boys from the Balkans, their conversion, separation from their families, and training in palace schools; the janissary corps as one of the first standing professional infantry armies; the founding prohibitions on kul marriage, heritable property, and outside allegiance; the erosion of the marriage ban in the early sixteenth century (generally attributed to Selim I) and the consequent drift toward hereditary succession within the corps; the seventeenth-century collapse of the

prohibitions on trade, with janissaries operating shops, heading guilds, collecting market dues, and holding tax farms; the withering of the devshirme by the later seventeenth century; the corps' transformation into a hereditary, propertied, praetorian power that made and unmade sultans and vetoed reforms across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and its violent abolition by Mahmud II in the "Auspicious Incident" of 1826 — all follow the standard scholarship (Goodwin, Imber, and the standard reference accounts) and were verified for this study. The dating of particular prohibitions' erosion is given as approximate because the scholarship itself treats these as gradual, uneven processes rather than dated events.

The nomenklatura spine. The nomenklatura as a system of revocable appointment lists held by party committees, covering all important positions and comprising on the order of one and a half per cent of the population; the tying of all privileges to the position; the abolition of private property that denied the member any independent base; the crossed chains of command in the national republics; the purging of "national communist" factions that acquired an independent local base; the near-bloodless transfer of the appointed elite across the 1991 collapse, with the security organs as the partial exception; and the conversion of positions into property through insider-influenced privatisation — all follow the standard literature and this series' own verified study of the Soviet case, from which the two quoted findings are taken. The Baltic-specific material is treated more fully, and its own sourcing qualifications noted, in that companion study.

Contested and interpretive. The central claims — that the kul and the nomenklatura are the same device (binding by withholding); that both decayed by the same conversion of registration into title; and that they ended differently because of how far each had made that conversion — are this framework's interpretation, offered in its own terms and testable against the record, not settled scholarly consensus. The strains section states the genuine limits: the imperfect identity of chattel slavery with administrative dependence; the very different tempos and triggers of the two decays (organic erosion versus systemic collapse); and the fact that neither ending was a pure internal test uncontaminated by external forces (a reforming sultan responding to foreign military pressure; a superpower collapse driven by economic failure and external pressure), so that the comparison explains the *behaviour of the elite* within these endings rather than the causes of the endings themselves. The moral disciplines — that the device's cleverness does not excuse its

materials (child enslavement; a caste of privilege resting on deportation and subjugation), and that a structural comparison of one shared mechanism is not a general equation of the two orders — are stated at full weight and are, in the author's judgement, the part of this study most important to keep.